

Discusses Need for Education that Spurs Innovation, Opportunities for Hispanic Students

Washington, DC – Today, Rep. Ben Ray Luján addressed the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU) at their 14th Annual National Capitol Forum on Hispanic Higher Education. Rep. Luján discussed the need to strengthen innovation through promoting education and the role Hispanic Serving Institutions will play in preparing Hispanics for the jobs of the future. New Mexico is home to 16 Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs), including the University of New Mexico, New Mexico State University, and others.

HACU comprises 450 member colleges and universities that enroll more than two-thirds of all Hispanics in American higher education. Their member institutions serve two million Hispanics in postsecondary education and 4.5 million students that attend Hispanic-Serving Institutions and other HACU member institutions.

FULL REMARKS AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY

Thank you for allowing me to speak today. Before I begin, I'd like to recognize the student delegation from my state of New Mexico. We have a vibrant and successful school system that enrolls thousands of students. The number of well-educated, highly skilled Hispanic students that our schools produce grows each year. And we're going to need to continue preparing our young people for jobs of the future - jobs that help our country get back on track at a time when we need it the most.

America faces the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression. As a result of eight years of a failed approach, 3.6 million American jobs have been lost since the recession began, and confidence in the economic future has plummeted. Americans are losing their homes and businesses, their jobs, their health care and their savings.

As our country faces an economic crisis that threatens to break the promise of the American dream, we must declare that we--that you and I--will not let that promise slip. Not when we have the ability and the will to act. We are facing challenging times, but if we can build on our

similarities and all that we have in common we can get our Great Nation back on track, and when we do, America will climb to new heights.

The great news is that we, the Hispanic community, have an unprecedented opportunity to participate in America's revival. Our nation, our communities, and our students need the opportunities that your member institutions provide. Our students benefit from a robust and challenging higher education system and our communities benefit when students return home, educated and ready to lead.

The doors your schools open are what will help our nation turn a corner. And we only have to look to recent history to see what happens when Hispanics are educated and involved. Hispanics are increasingly being called into leadership roles in business and public service. Hispanics from all walks of life are working to bear the fruits of their education in boardrooms and in the halls of Congress.

During these difficult times, it is more important than ever that our students are prepared to contribute, to lead. Hispanic students need to be prepared with a quality higher education. Hispanic students need to learn history, civics and law to enter public life and become the voice of their towns and cities. Hispanic students need to learn to be great writers and great communicators—so their ideals can be put into action. Hispanic students need to learn math and science skills that will allow them to draw plans for buildings and design new cars that will take advantage of new energy. Hispanic students in my district have the privilege of attending schools where they are learning to operate wind turbines and create solar panels. These high skilled science jobs are the jobs of the future, the jobs that will sustain our economy and the jobs that Hispanic students must be ready to fill as we create them through innovation.

Innovation has always been a hallmark of American success. And as a member of the Committee on Science and Technology, I am committed to maintaining the high standard of innovation that has helped generations of Americans succeed. Now, our ability to get our country back on track relies on our ability to change the way our country generates energy through innovation.

During this Congress, the Committee on Science and Technology will be actively evaluating Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics education programs – making sure that our students learn the skills they need to fill jobs in renewable energy, health care, and other growing fields.

As we take a comprehensive look at these important programs--we'll make sure that if the federal government is committing funding to a program, it works. We'll also seek to increase coordination of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics education to reduce redundancy and improve existing programs.

Part of the Committee's evaluation will include a comprehensive review of diversity in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) programs under the federal government. Some programs work and some don't. We have to take a look at these programs and make sure that programs designed to promote diversity actually broaden minority participation in Science Technology, Engineering and Mathematics. We need to hear from you about what is working in your communities.

We must make a commitment to restore science and innovation as the keys to a new American Economy. Innovation is the future for our nation. And, together we must ensure that our students build new solar panels, research new computer chips, and become part of the workforce for the 21st century.

America's prosperity depends on investments in research and development, on our ability to adapt through innovation. And our nation's prosperity depends on the ability of our schools to educate and prepare young people for the jobs of the future - the jobs that we will create in the next five, ten and twenty years.

Together, we will prepare Hispanic students for the jobs of the future and secure prosperity for future generations and our country. Our nation has, quite simply, never needed HACU more. So for all that you do—thank you.